Summary: Maria Karpińska, Analysis: Karolina Anna Kulpa, "Entry on: Frogs the Latinists [Żaby łacinniczki] / Latin [Łacina] by Julian Tuwim", peer-reviewed by Katarzyna Marciniak and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/141. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

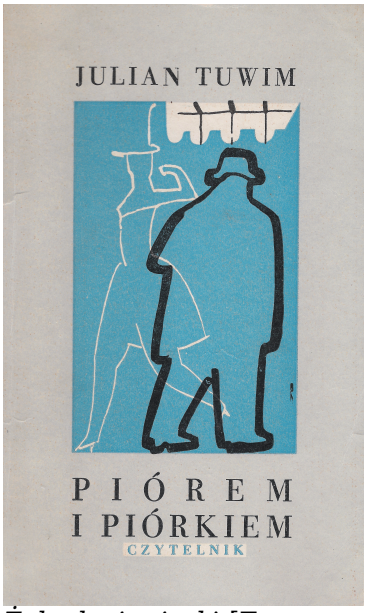
Julian Tuwim

Frogs the Latinists [Żaby łacinniczki] / Latin [Łacina]

Poland (1930)

TAGS: Catiline Horace Latin (Language) Rome Virgil





*Żaby łacinniczk*i [Frogs the Latinists], [in:] Julian Tuwim, *Piórem i piórkiem* [With Pen and Quill]. Courtesy of Czytelnik.

General information	
Title of the work	Frogs the Latinists [Żaby łacinniczki] / Latin [Łacina]
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	1930
First Edition Details	*Żaby łacinniczki* [Frogs the Latinists],1930. *Łacina* [Latin], 1938.
Genre	Didactic poetry, Instructional and educational works, Poetry
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Summary: Maria Karpińska, University of Warsaw, mariakarpinska@student.uw.edu.pl Analysis: Karolina Anna Kulpa, University of Warsaw, k.kulpa@al.uw.edu.pl

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw, kamar@al.uw.edu.pl Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Creators



Photograph by Władysław Miernicki, retrieved from the National Digital Archives.

Julian Tuwim , 1894 - 1953
(Author)

An eminent poet, satirist and translator; the co-founder of the literary cabaret *Pikador*, one of the creators and main representatives of the famous group of poets *Skamander*; author of lyric poetry, satirical poems, poems for children, stage adaptations, lyrics for popular songs as well as books on literary history. His poems achieved an enormous popularity among readers and became classics of modern Polish literature. He also translated such authors as Horace, Whitman, Longfellow, Rimbaud, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol. Tuwim's works for children are exceptional. Today his poems like *Lokomotywa* [The Locomotive], *Słoń Trąbalski* [Trunky Elephant], *Okulary* [Eyeglasses], *Spóźniony Słowik* [The Tardy Nightingale], *Rzepka* [The Little Turnip] or *Abecadło* [The Alphabet] belong to the canon of children's literature. The value of his poems for children lies in the creative, melodious use of language, unusual skills in playing with words combined with original narrative concepts. On January 6, 2013 – exactly one hundred years since his literary debut in the newspaper *Kurier Warszawski* – the year 2013 was proclaimed by Polish authorities the Year of Julian Tuwim.

Website of the Julian Tuwim and Irena Tuwim Foundation (accessed: June 28, 2018).

Sources:

Cieślik, Tomasz and Krystyna Ratajczak, eds., *Julian Tuwim. Biografia, twórczość, recepcja*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2007.

"Julian Tuwim", in Julian Krzyżanowski, ed., *Literatura polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, vol. 2: N–Ż, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1985, 506–507.

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Matywiecki, Piotr, *Twarz Tuwima*, Warszawa: WAB, 2007.

Urbanek, Mariusz. *Tuwim*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2004.

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Additional information

Translation

Latin: "Latinitas", trans. Krzysztof Tomasz Witczak [Christophorus Thomas Witczak], *Živa Antika* 46 (1996): 40.

Summary

Based on: Katarzyna Marciniak, Elżbieta Olechowska, Joanna Kłos, Michał Kucharski (eds.), *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity: A Catalogue*, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2013, 444 pp.

In *Żaby łacinniczki* [Frogs the Latinists] the poet extends his thanks to frogs for their spirit-lifting croaking which he claims to be done in Latin. It is a twelve-verse poem based on the humorous similarity of sound between Latin words (such as quamquam or cum) and the croaking of frogs. Tuwim plays with words, skillfully rhyming in "frog Latin."

The poem *Łacina* [Latin] begins with a lamentation on the fate of someone who must learn Latin. Memorizing variations of Latin grammatical forms is labelled as misery enhanced by an unlimited number of exceptions. And yet, suddenly, all the misery ends: Latin starts to circulate in the student's veins. He is proud to understand and know so much about Antiquity. Reading in Latin becomes a new and joyful experience resulting in an appreciation for the ancient civilisation. At the end, the student recalls the laborious cramming of Latin conjugations and declensions but sees it as worthwhile because the efforts taught him to love Ancient Rome. The poet tells the story with his typical, playful eloquence, interspersing the Polish text with many Latin words.

Analysis

Julian Tuwim wrote several poems about learning Latin, for e.g. *Łacina* [Latin] published in 1938 and *Nad Cezarem* [Over Caesar] published in 1926. In both, he expresses joy that while learning Latin could be difficult, it brings important rewards helping to understand our history, mainly ancient times. So we read in the amusing poem *Żaby łacinniczki* that frogs' croaking can be helpful for Latin students because in Polish the sound frogs make is identical with the Latin "cum." In the poem *Łacina* we are told that annoying repetition of

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Latin declensions brings understanding and love for ancient Rome and Roman writers. And, finally, in *Nad Cezarem* the poet recalls with nostalgia the time spent in school reading *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* [Commentaries on the Gallic War] by Julius Caesar; he introduces in the text of the poem short well-known quotations from *De bello Gallico*. At the time of the publication of the three mentioned poems, Latin was a compulsory subject in Polish secondary schools.* After WW1, Poland recovered independence and started the process of unification of three different systems of administration, including education.** The system of teaching Latin in the Russian partition was presented e.g. in *Wspomnienia niebieskiego mundurka* [Memories of the Blue School Uniform] by Witold Gomulicki from 1906 (see the entry). In 1932 brothers Janusz and Wacław Jędrzejewicz introduced a reform of education for the new generations of young Poles. Latin became a compulsory subject during four years of gymnasium. After WW2, communist authorities began reducing teaching of Latin at school until it became optional.***

Most of the texts in the Polish literature where Latin lessons are discussed, such as Gomulicki's school stories, Tuwim's poems and *Lekcja Łaciny* [Latin Lesson] by Zbigniew Herbert from 1973 (published in *Labirynt nad morzem*. Warsaw: Zeszyty Literackie, 2000, pp.165–197) highlight learning Latin as something difficult, but important for knowing and understanding ancient Rome and Roman literature and also their significance for the Polish culture. A different view on Latin we see in *Ferdydurke* by Witold Gombrowicz (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Rój", 1938), where the author mocks Latin teachers and presents this ancient language as boring and useless.

* See Wanda Popiak, *Łacina i greka w polskiej szkole w latach 1919–1939,* Warszawa: Centrum Doskonalenia Nauczycieli im. Władysława Spasowskiego, 1990.

** More in: Elżbieta Olechowska, "Teaching Latin and Greek in Inter-War Poland", in David Movrin, Elżbieta Olechowska, eds., *Classic and Class*, Warsaw: OBTA et al., 2016, 214–228.

*** More in: Barbara Brzuska "Latin and Politics in People's Poland", in *Classic and Class…*, 229–286.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Catiline Horace Latin (Language) Rome Virgil
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Humour Knowledge Learning School
Further Reading	Brzuska, Barbara, "Latin and Politics in People's Poland", in David Movrin, Elżbieta Olechowska, eds., *Classic and Class*, Warsaw: OBTA et al., 2016, 229–286. Olechowska, Elżbieta, *Teaching Latin and Greek in Inter-War Poland,* in David Movrin, Elżbieta Olechowska, eds., *Classic and Class*, Warsaw: OBTA et al., 2016, 214–228. Popiak, Wanda, *Łacina i greka w polskiej szkole w latach 1919–1939,* Warszawa: Centrum Doskonalenia Nauczycieli im. Władysława Spasowskiego, 1990.
Addenda	Entry based on edition: *Żaby łacinniczki* [Frogs the Latinists] and *Łacina* [Latin], in: Julian Tuwim, *Piórem i piórkiem* [With Pen and Quill]. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1957, pp. 174, 176.

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